

MUSEUM NEWS

THE TOLEDO MUSEUM OF ART
FOUNDED BY EDWARD DRUMMOND LIBBEY

NUMBER 77

TOLEDO, OHIO

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CAMBODIAN STONE TERMINAL FROM ANKOR



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Art is that science whose laws applied to all things made by man make them most pleasing to the senses.

George W. Stevens.

EDITORIAL

DURING the years of depression we have intentionally been somewhat remiss in our pursuit of Museum dues.

Now that we have turned the corner, we must resume our duty to speak with our Members in friendly fashion on that subject.

Through conservative management of funds and economical operation we have weathered the bad years and expanded threefold in physical plant and cultural opportunities.

The fact that we are an endowed institution does not imply that we have unlimited means. On the contrary, our operating funds become more and more reduced as interest rates decline. Hence we now need more than ever the support of our Members.

We have developed a far-reaching educational system which is contributing greatly each year to the mental growth of thousands of Toledo children; to the enrichment of the lives of other thousands of Toledo adults. For its maintenance at its present high standards as well as for its expansion to meet most obvious needs we must count upon the support of public-spirited citizens.

We will, therefore, be most grateful for the prompt payment of Museum dues and for any other financial tid-bits that the generous may see fit to drop into our coffers.

A SCULPTURED TERMINAL FROM ANKOR

RECOVERED after a lapse of five centuries from the encroaching jungle, Ankor stands today as one of the great sites of ancient civilization, comparable in importance with Luxor, Persepolis, Delphi, Pompeii. Located in northwestern Cambodia, this ruin, a complex of magnificent buildings now in various stages of disintegration, remained hidden for centuries until discovered only a few years ago by an exploring Frenchman. It immediately became famous because of its great size and because of the great wealth of its architectural ornament and sculpture. The buildings are completely covered with carvings of sculptural significance, any of which would be welcome additions to museum collections. Few, however, are seen outside the immediate region of Ankor and, therefore, we were fortunate in being able to add to the permanent collection of the Toledo Museum a very important example of sculpture from this famous site. It is a large railhead, or terminal, of sandstone, the importance of which is equally defined by its artistic significance and by its uniqueness in American museum collections.

Ankor was the capital city of the Khmers, a people who lived in this part of Cambodia from the late ninth century until about fourteen hundred A.D. when they abandoned the site, leaving only their great stone buildings behind them.

The royal city of Ankor Thom, which is one of the important parts of the Ankor complex, has suffered most and is in ruins. It must, however, have been most impressive for it was erected out of masses of carved stone, including monumental towers whose four sides are decorated with colossal faces of tutelary gods; avenues flanked by balustrades of massive seated figures supporting in their laps the extended bodies of serpents; and also long building walls, balconies and colonnades all completely covered with carvings in relief. The craftsmen who carved the stones at Ankor Thom worked in a broad manner uniformly and consistently expressing inherent strength and vigor.

Ankor Wat, the best preserved building of all, is technically referred to as the temple of the capital. It is stupendous, the compound being about a mile square and the temple itself being built up with handsome terraces and towers. Sculpture envelops this temple in a continuous flow of line throughout its interesting decorative detail. The architectural embellishment seems to have been conceived in a more delicate fashion than at Ankor Thom and yet there is here also a fundamental feeling for rugged form.



A SIMILAR TERMINAL IN THE MUSEE GUIMET, PARIS

There is a difference between the sculptural style of Ankor Thom and that of Ankor Wat although many of the same decorative motifs appear in both places and the technical handling seems identical. Certainly one finds two characteristics consistently combined, a broad virile treatment of subject matter and delicate decorative detail, even as in the Toledo terminal. Our Toledo specimen is typical of the best at Ankor, a fine example of vigorous architectural sculpture, the inevitable concomitant of good monumental architecture. It obviously retains a strikingly individual entity though now removed from the setting of which it was only a part.



REAR VIEW OF THE CAMBODIAN TERMINAL

A real appreciation of the art of Ankor can be realized only by a visit to the ruins themselves, but one fine example such as ours is a starting point at least. Here we have mythological thought and artistic training combined with an Oriental freedom of imagination. In this interpretation of a mythological idea the imagination of the Oriental artist seems limitless, but he was probably bound by the dictates of contemporary thought and practice as are artists of any time or place. Nevertheless the wealth of mythology at his command, the range of super-possibilities of the men and beasts that made up his subject matter, gave the Oriental artist a wider range. In our example we find two mythological themes blended into one. There is a man-like bird-headed creature, the Garuda, and a hooded snake, the Naga. The Garuda is shown astride the Naga, symbolic of the victory of the upper world over the nether. The wings of the Garuda form a halo-like arrangement above its head and the



ORNAMENT ON THE BASE OF THE TERMINAL

human torso, robust in form with full breasts, taut loins and tightly gripping legs, is indicative of its superhuman strength. The Naga rears its multiple heads with the force of a snake about to strike and in this way adds greatly to the virility of the design.

In its original position this terminal was at the end of a long rail and the rail was the extended body of the Naga. Staircases at Ankor were balustraded with similar rails as were also the bridges over the moats. The terminal is monolithic. Originally it was upheld at rail height by piers uniformly spaced, the form of which is illustrated by a similar terminal owned by the Musee Guimet, Paris, and reproduced herewith.

The body of the Naga rests on a supporting slab, the forward part of which is slightly thicker than the after part, giving an upward tilt which produces an effect of strength and elevation at this point. The decorative design on the sides of this slab is an elaborate scroll pattern with a feather and dot motif above and below. It is obvious that this terminal was to be placed where one side was to be more visible than the other, because one side only is completely finished. The secondary side is lacking in finish as if the necessity of a symmetrical effect was of little importance.

The exact location from which our terminal came is as yet undetermined. If from Ankor Thom it would be hard now to find its original location so devastated is this site by the action of natural destructive forces over a long period of time. As a worthy historic document of the skill and artistic ability of the master builders of Ankor it now graces the permanent collections of the Toledo Museum of Art.